

Fuel 4 Women



KSC/CCAFS HEALTH EDUCATION AND WELLNESS PROGRAM

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

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What is Chronic Fatigue Syndrome?

Chronic fatigue syndrome, or CFS, is a debilitating and complex disorder characterized by profound fatigue that is not improved by bed rest and that may be worsened by physical or mental activity. Persons with CFS most often function at a substantially lower level of activity than they were capable of before the onset of illness. In addition to these key defining characteristics, patients report various nonspecific symptoms, including weakness, muscle pain, impaired memory and/or mental concentration, insomnia, and post-exertional fatigue lasting more than 24 hours. In some cases, CFS can persist for years.

Symptoms of CFS?

As the name *chronic fatigue syndrome* suggests, this illness is accompanied by fatigue. However, it's not the kind of fatigue we experience after a particularly busy day or week, after a sleepless night or after a single stressful event. It's a severe, incapacitating fatigue that isn't improved by bed rest and that may be worsened by physical or mental activity. It's an all-encompassing fatigue that results in a dramatic decline in both activity level and stamina.



People with CFS function at a significantly lower level of activity than they were capable of prior to becoming ill. The illness results in a substantial reduction in occupational (work-related), personal, social or educational activities.

The fatigue of CFS is accompanied by characteristic symptoms lasting at least six months.

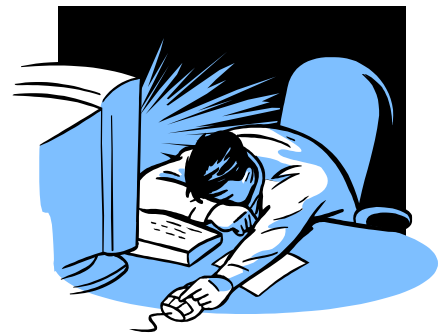
These symptoms include:

- difficulties with memory and concentration
- problems with sleep
- persistent muscle pain

- joint pain (without redness or swelling)
- headaches
- tender lymph nodes
- increased malaise (fatigue and sickness) following exertion
- sore throat

The symptoms listed above are the symptoms used to diagnose this illness. However, many CFS patients may experience other symptoms, including:

- irritable bowel
- depression or psychological problems (irritability, mood swings, anxiety, panic attacks)
- chills and night sweats
- visual disturbances (blurring, sensitivity to light, eye pain)
- allergies or sensitivities to foods, odors, chemicals, medications or noise
- brain fog (feeling like you're in a mental fog)
- difficulty maintaining upright position, dizziness, balance problems or fainting



Symptoms and their consequences can be severe. CFS can be as disabling as multiple sclerosis, lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, congestive heart failure and similar chronic conditions. Symptom severity varies from patient to patient and may vary over time for an individual patient.

What are the Risk Factors?

- People of every age, gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic group can have CFS.
- CFS affects women at four times the rate of men.
- Research indicates that CFS is most common in people in their 40s and 50s.
- Although CFS is much less common in children than in adults, children can develop the illness, particularly during the teen years.

What Causes CFS?

- Despite an intensive, nearly 20-year search, the cause of CFS remains unknown. Many different infectious agents and physiologic and psychological causes have been considered, and the search continues.
- Much of the ongoing research into a cause has centered on the roles of the immune, endocrine and nervous systems may play in CFS. More recently, interactions among these factors are under evaluation.

- Genetic and environmental factors may play a role in developing and/or prolonging the illness, although more research is needed to confirm this. CDC is applying cutting-edge genomic and proteomic tools to understand the origins and pathogenesis of CFS.
- CFS is not caused by depression, although the two illnesses often coexist, and many patients with CFS have no psychiatric disorder.

Diagnosis of CFS

The most important, yet time consuming task in the diagnostic process is discounting other medical conditions and illnesses as the source of the patient's ill health. As mentioned previously, there are two main criteria and eight symptoms that define Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. In order for a patient to be diagnosed with CFS, four of the eight symptoms must be present along with fatigue that interferes with physical, mental, social and educational activities. It is also possible for CFS patients come to their doctors with additional symptoms.

How is CFS Treated?

Managing chronic fatigue syndrome can be as complex as the illness itself. There is no cure yet, no prescription drugs have been developed specifically for CFS, and symptoms vary considerably over time. These factors complicate the treatment picture and require you and your health care team to constantly monitor and frequently revise treatment strategies.

It may take some time to find a combination of traditional and alternative therapies that works for you, but it's important not to delay symptom management. For instance, untreated sleep problems can actually make other symptoms—like pain and memory problems—worse.

One key to managing CFS is working with your doctor and other health care practitioners to create an individualized treatment program for you. This program should be based on a combination of therapies that address coping techniques, symptoms and activity management.

A multidisciplinary team of health care professionals working together to develop this individualized care plan is ideal. This team might include physicians and other primary care professionals, mental health professionals, rehabilitation specialists and physical or exercise therapists. Other professionals, like a sleep therapist or dietician, can be added as needed, and you may only need one or two consultations with such specialists.

Quick Facts

- A study conducted by researchers at DePaul University estimates CFS at approximately 422 per 100,000 persons in the U.S
- 90% of patients have not been diagnosed and are not receiving proper medical care for their illness
- Experts think as many as half a million Americans have a CFS-like condition.



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- ♦ *Educating women about their health*
- ♦ *Encouraging women to act against disease*

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RESOURCES

Chronic Fatigue and Immune Dysfunction Syndrome Association of America
www.cfids.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
www.4women.gov

National Women's Health Resource Center
www.healthywomen.org